

In the Claims:

Please enter the following amended claims 16 and 34:

sub H1
16. (Twice Amended) An interconnect comprising:

- (a) one or more metal lines formed from a first metal layer, said metal lines having gaps therebetween;
- (b) low-k material filling the gaps between the metal lines and having a height and one or more vertical portions;
- (c) a protective layer formed directly over the metal lines and the low-k material, wherein the protective layer covers at least one vertical portion of the low-k material;
- (d) a dielectric layer formed over the protective layer, wherein the dielectric layer has a different composition than the low-k material and the protective layer;
- (e) one or more vias etched in the dielectric layer;
- (f) a metal for filling the vias;
- (g) a second metal layer formed over the dielectric layer; and
- (h) one or more openings in the protective layer for allowing the metal vias to contact the first metal lines.

R2
34. (Once Amended) An interconnect comprising:

- (a) a plurality of metal lines formed from a first metal layer, said metal lines having gaps therebetween;

(b) material filling the gaps between the metal lines and having a height and one or more vertical portions;

(c) a protective layer formed directly over the metal lines and the material, wherein the protective layer covers at least one vertical portion of the material;

(d) a dielectric layer formed over the protective layer, wherein the dielectric layer has a different composition than the protective layer;

(e) one or more vias etched in the dielectric layer;

(f) a metal within the vias;

(g) a second metal layer formed over and in direct contact with the dielectric layer;

and

(h) one or more openings in the protective layer for allowing the metal in the vias to contact the metal lines.